

FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union ♦♦♦ www.fbu.org.uk

October 2015

MEET THE NEW BOSS?

**Government plans
police takeover of
fire service**

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**POLICE
SPIED
ON UNIONS**

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RIGHTS UNDER
ATTACK**

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Matt Wrack

We will continue the fight for pensions justice

Since the general election we have been assessing some of the key challenges facing us under the new government. They may think the issue of firefighter pensions is over. It is not, and we will continue to campaign and challenge the attacks on our pensions.

Under the coalition government we were told very clearly that we would not beat them on the issue of retired firefighters' pension commutations.

But we *did* beat them, winning hundreds of millions of pounds for retired firefighters (and police officers).

Even when the odds are stacked against us we do not give up. We are now embarking on the legal challenge over protection arrangements, and it is likely to be a complicated process. We will keep you updated.

More cuts on the way – attacks on workers' rights – and a further pay freeze

Meanwhile we are preparing for attacks from the government on other fronts. The comprehensive spending review (CSR) is the process by which central government allocates resources for public services for the coming three years.

We have argued that it is short-sighted to make cuts to the fire and rescue service at a time when we have already seen the biggest cuts in our history, but also when we are in the middle of discussions

about broadening the role of our service – as we discussed at our conference in May and partly set out in articles in the last issue of *Firefighter*.

The FBU's submission to the CSR process will be issued to branches shortly.

Simultaneously, the Tories have embarked on the biggest attack on workers' rights in 30 years.

The UK already has some of the most restrictive laws on trade unions in Western Europe. The Tories now intend to make further attacks through the Trade Union Bill.

You can see more details of this on pages 10/11.

The proposals raise this question: why would the Tories restrict further trade union laws at this time? When we consider the further cuts to jobs and services which will arise from the spending review mentioned above, the answer is obvious – they want to attack us while limiting our powers to resist.

In addition, the chancellor set out in the budget that public sector workers would face a further four years of pay restraint, with rises

limited to 1%, ensuring the living standards of public sector workers continue to be squeezed.

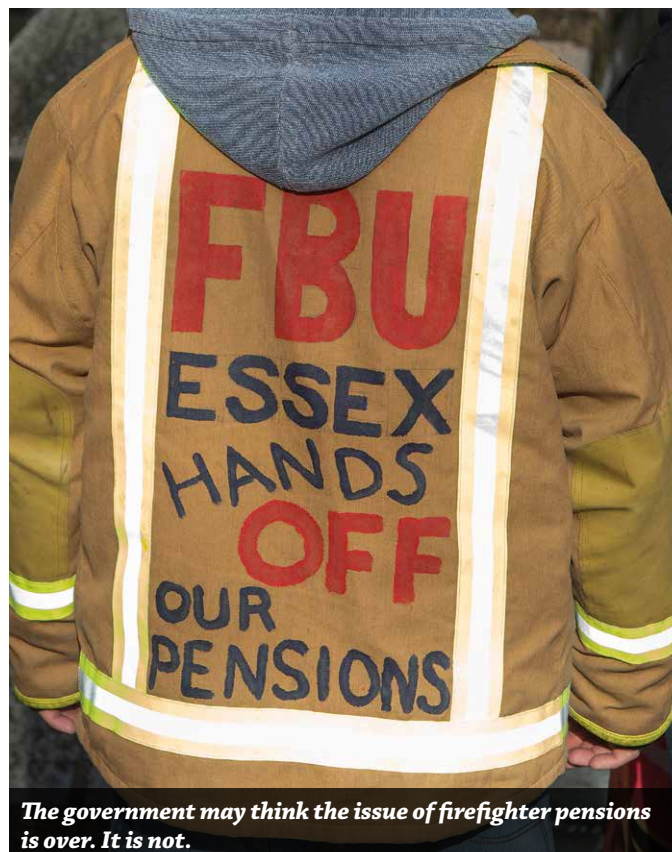
Long term austerity – and building a resistance

The government's plans for our pay, pensions, jobs and our service are for more of the same – further cuts and falls in living standards. Workers in the public and private sector continue to pay the price for the global economic mess that followed 2007/8.

Despite Osborne's promises, there is no sign of an early return to prosperity. Instead, the government's austerity policies show it intends to shift wealth, power and resources from the majority to the minority – from labour to capital.

The election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader is a measure of the anger these attacks have provoked. At the start of the process Corbyn was the clear outsider. But tens of thousands of people got involved in his campaign, reflecting a mood of resistance to the cuts and to endless austerity.

Many people are evidently sick to death of politicians who all talk the same and offer identical policies. This does not mean any sort of endorsement for everything that Corbyn says or does – politics should be about debate and discussion. But it does offer a chance to demand a different approach from the one the Tories are offering.



The government may think the issue of firefighter pensions is over. It is not.

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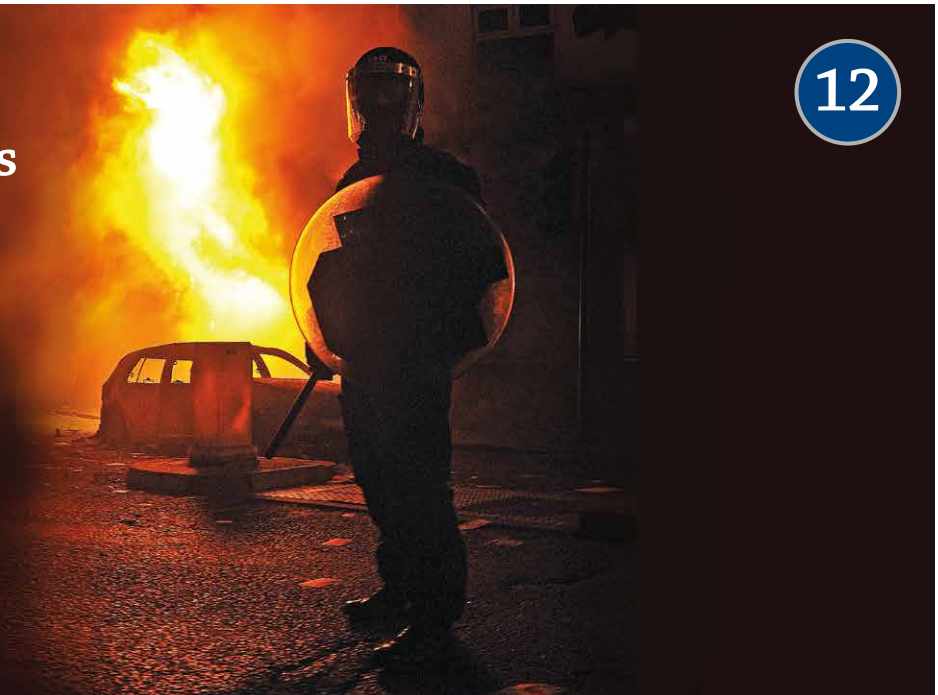
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South Yorkshire firefighters on strike

FBU wants answers over overtime for chiefs for working during strike

South Yorkshire

A freedom of information request by *The Yorkshire Post* has revealed that three fire chiefs in South Yorkshire were paid £40,000 in overtime payments for working through strikes last year and this year.

The extraordinarily hefty payments were made in spite of there being no overtime provision in nationally agreed terms for chief officers, which perhaps explains why the three culprits were paid an area manager's hourly overtime rate of £49.10.

The number of hours claimed for is also being questioned as it exceeds the number lost through strikes.

A payment of £14,390 to chief officer Jamie Courtney equates to just over 293 hours, while deputy chief Mark Shaw was paid £13,290, equating to almost 271 hours.

The total number of working hours lost to strikes in 2014-15 was 260, 60 of which were lost during normal office hours.

The Yorkshire Post contacted 15 other fire services and none of them had paid overtime to chief officers for working

through strikes. It is understood that South Yorkshire is the only fire service in the country to have made these kinds of payments in overtime.

The FBU is calling for an inquiry into the suspect payments, which were agreed by South Yorkshire Fire Authority chair Jim Andrews after he was approached by the authority's senior management team. He did not, however, inform other authority members of the payments, and he could not recall the date he approved them.

Ian Murray, FBU executive council

"It appears that while firefighters were losing money while quite rightly taking strike action in defence of their pensions others, who stand to gain significant benefit from the pension scheme when they retire, rub salt in those wounds by claiming vast amounts of money in overtime"

member for Yorkshire and Humberside, told *Firefighter*: "We are shocked and dismayed at being informed of this claim.

"At a time when we are being told that every single penny counts, when we have seen unprecedented cuts to the front line fire service in South Yorkshire, this leaves a very bad taste.

"The FBU will be seeking answers from managers, the chair of the fire authority and its auditors."

Sheffield South East Labour MP Clive Betts is backing an investigation into the payments.

Ian Murray said: "It appears that while firefighters were losing money while quite rightly taking strike action in defence of their pensions others, who stand to gain significant benefit from the pension scheme when they retire, rub salt in those wounds by claiming vast amounts of money in overtime when they are already part of a 24/7, 365-day cover rota.

"Given that some of the claimants earn comfortably more than £100k a year, it is astounding and wrong that these claims were approved – a firefighter would have to work for around six months for what these individuals worked a mere 250 hours for."

Tom Warren:
Massive progress for
campaign in major
European economies



FBU tribunal victory exposes 'irrational and perverse' FRS

Cambridgeshire

Kerry Baigent (*below*), a former frontline firefighter, Cambridgeshire rep for the FBU and former secretary of the union's national women's committee, has won an employment tribunal decision against Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS).

The tribunal found she had been unfairly constructively dismissed due to an "irrational and perverse exercise".

It also found that CFRS had made a decision to impose an untenable working pattern on Baigent, who had been a frontline firefighter for 21 years.

She had previously been successfully managing her full-time work as a firefighter around her family life by working her 48 hours of day

and night shifts in Cambridge allowing her three rota days in which to travel back to her home and family in Somerset before her next shift started again in Cambridge.

The tribunal noted that Baigent was able to carry out much of her work as an elected union rep on these rota days.

Baigent said: "Firefighting was a career I loved and I was desperate not to give it up. I was forced out of my job by the actions of a senior management team who made a clear decision to make my working life untenable.

"I am pleased the tribunal found in my favour and that the disgraceful conduct and culture of CFRS senior management has been exposed to the public.

"The message to cowardly, authoritarian fire service

managers everywhere is clear: if you pick on firefighters, the FBU will take you on."



Praise for air show crash response

East and West Sussex

The FBU has praised the response of firefighters in East and West Sussex who responded to the Shoreham air show disaster that killed 11 people.

Danni Armstrong, executive council member for the South East region of the FBU, said union members, along with other emergency services, had worked tirelessly after the crash.

She said: "They dealt with the fallout of the incident like the true professionals they are. The thoughts of all firefighters

who responded to this tragic accident will be with the friends and families of the people who lost their lives.

"We raised concerns with the county council last year over a lack of resources

and how badly fire cover was stretched across the region.

"Ongoing budget cuts mean we have fewer firefighters and equipment to respond to major emergencies."



Members of the emergency services search for disaster victims on the A27 at Shoreham in West Sussex

SOUNDING OFF

The most popular tax in the world?

Tom Warren, campaign coordinator for the Robin Hood Tax, welcomes the FBU as its latest member

Popularity is not something people would usually associate with a tax (even one named after a loveable rogue), but support for the Robin Hood Tax campaign has been picking up pace lately.

It proposes a tax on financial transactions designed to "throw sand in the wheels" of dangerously volatile, high frequency trading in currencies, shares and bonds. It would also raise billions for cash-strapped governments.

The Robin Hood Tax campaign recently passed a watershed moment – more than a million actions have now been taken to demand that banks pay their fair share to help those hit hardest by the financial crisis.

Our campaign has won the support of 1,000 economists. From Bill Gates to Nobel Prize winning economist Joe Stiglitz, we have never been so popular.

We are delighted to announce that the Fire Brigades Union is the latest organisation to join the 120 other organisations in the Robin Hood Tax Campaign. The union's addition to our coalition of faith groups, NGOs, environmental organisations and trade unions could not have been timelier.

With massive progress continuing across many of the major economies of Europe – 11 countries, including Germany and France, are finalising an ambitious version of the tax this month – UK-based organisations are recognising the opportunity that this presents closer to home.

With all major parties in agreement that the British economy needs to be rebalanced, the need for an under-taxed and hugely wealthy financial sector to help that transition is vital.

With the potential to raise £20bn in the UK every year, the Robin Hood Tax is an innovative solution whose time has come.

■ For more information visit www.robinhoodtax.org.uk.

Rights and cuts warning as unions remember 'the longest strike'

Burston school strike

The government's Trade Union Bill is "the biggest attack on trade union rights in 30 years", FBU general secretary Matt Wrack told the 3,000-strong annual Burston rally in September, writes Mitch Howard.

"If you applied the logic they want to apply to trade unions, virtually no MP would be sitting in the House of Commons and no councillor anywhere would be making decisions about cutting your services, because they would not meet the balloting thresholds they want unions to meet," he declared.

The Burston event celebrates "the longest strike in history" which began in 1914 when the Norfolk village's schoolchildren walked out to support their sacked teachers, Annie and Tom Higdon.

The Higdon had fallen foul of the rural squirearchy for organising agricultural workers into a union, but villagers set up an alternative strike school which, supported by the labour movement, continued until 1939.

Wrack warned that in



Matt Wrack (right) and Jeremy Corbyn (centre) outside the Burston strike school building with FBU brigade chair for Norfolk Peter Greeves. Each stone of the school's facade bears the name of a union branch that contributed funds for its construction.

November the government would unveil a further round of attacks on public services in the comprehensive spending review.

"Here in Norfolk, they are talking about 90 whole time and 146 retained posts and 21 fire engines being axed in a small county fire and rescue service. That's the scale of cuts they are talking about."

He reminded the rally that it was not firefighters or people providing school dinners who had caused the financial crisis, "it was the banks with their thirst for

endless profits".

Wrack welcomed the "remarkable mass movement" unleashed by the leadership campaign of Jeremy Corbyn, a fellow speaker at Burston.

But he warned that Corbyn would face attempts to undermine him as Labour leader. A mass campaign in the Labour Party and in trade unions was needed "to keep up the demand that we want politicians who will fight for us as hard as those in power fight for those they really represent".

Website campaign against cuts

North Yorkshire

The FBU in North Yorkshire has launched a dedicated website to campaign against cuts that will decimate local fire and rescue services and lead to longer response times to emergency incidents.

Their website, www.no2firecuts.com, allows visitors to find out what the cuts will mean to them and how it will affect fire cover in the region.

A petition calling on the county's seven MPs and its fire authority to stop the proposed cuts has already been signed by more than 2,000 people.

The authority's proposals would see

fire engines replaced with smaller tactical response vehicles carrying less equipment and crewed by fewer firefighters.

Steve Howley, North Yorks brigade secretary, said: "To be effective, firefighters need to be able to get to an emergency, in the right amount of time, with the right type of equipment, to be of any value to the public."

"Tactical response vehicles are small vans, crewed by two firefighters, with limited equipment – meaning that at incidents such as house fires and RTAs they will have to wait around for fire engines to arrive before any action can be taken. As a result rescues will be delayed and lives will be put at risk."

IN BRIEF

Community safety research survey

The FBU has teamed up with Tony Prosser who is conducting a PhD research project through Nottingham Trent University. It will investigate the attitudes of operational firefighters to community safety and home fire safety checks/visits in particular.

You can assist the research by completing a survey, which should take 15 -20 minutes, at <https://ntpsychology.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/hfsc>.

Data collected from the survey will be confidential and anonymous, participation is entirely voluntary and participants will have the right to withdraw at any time until 31 December this year.

FBU briefs MPs

The FBU has issued a parliamentary briefing as part of its ongoing mission to keep members of parliament up to date on the issues and challenges facing the fire and rescue service and the UK's firefighters.

It is an important part of the union's political engagement and campaigning strategy to make sure the fire and rescue service is always on top of politicians' agendas.

Each bulletin is available on the FBU's website via the Fire and Rescue Service Matters campaigns page. Members can use these documents to lobby their MPs to safeguard and protect the vital, lifesaving public service that firefighters provide throughout the UK.

Go to www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/FRSmatters to find the bulletins.

Noble: new national treasurer

Executive council member for the North East Andy Noble has been elected to serve as the FBU's new national treasurer, taking over the position from Dave Limer who will retire in December.

Noble said: "I'm under no illusions as to the tasks that lie ahead. Under the Tories' coordinated anti-trade union agenda we have a wide range of threats facing us, all of which are intended to make it increasingly difficult to organise."

"I'll be doing all I can to ensure we continue to thrive as an industry specific, independent, free trade union, the only union truly representative of all firefighters and emergency control room staff throughout the UK."



MARK THOMAS

**NEWS
FOCUS**

'Once again it's the FBU, and only the FBU, that is fighting for firefighters'



Female and ethnic minority firefighters may have suffered discrimination on the basis of their age, so the FBU is setting up two further legal challenges

FBU launches discrimination cases against government over pensions

The FBU has launched a significant age discrimination legal challenge to the government, backed by the claims of 14,500 members.

The move follows four years of negotiations with the government for improved transitional protection arrangements for firefighters.

The union has been able to throw down the gauntlet because of the magnificent response to its recent online pension claim.

This union registered the details of members whose pensions were not fully protected, information that was then used to identify those members who had faced a disproportionate attack on their pension.

The FBU believe the members affected suffered discrimination on the basis of their age. The injured parties in this group are, however, more likely to be women and/or have an ethnic minority background – female and ethnic minority firefighters are relative newcomers to the fire and rescue service.

This has meant the union is setting up two further legal challenges for discrimination on the grounds of gender and race.

The challenge has already been submitted on behalf of 6,000 claimants who are members of the 1992 Firefighter Pension Scheme (FPS) and Retained Duty System (RDS) modified scheme.

Sean Starbuck, FBU national officer, said: "We have always said that we would keep fighting on the pensions issue and explore every avenue to get firefighters the

pension they deserve.

"It has been a difficult, complex challenge to mount, but we got there in the end. We are extremely grateful to the affected members for their patience.

"As always with any legal challenge, there are no guarantees of winning, but our legal team recognise the strength of our claim and they believe the prospects of success are good.

"Once again it's the FBU, and only the FBU, that is fighting for firefighters. Others make plenty of noise about representing firefighters without actually doing anything."

To date, no other public sector union has pursued pension claims of this nature.

Members who were unable to fill in the claim form by the deadline are going to be given a second chance.

Sean Starbuck said: "We are planning to open the claim form process again later this year to make sure every single member has their chance to get what is rightly theirs."

THE CLAIM PROCESS

- ❖ There are claims against 50 different fire authorities.
- ❖ Each claim has a partner/ dual claim against the secretary of state in England; ministers in Wales; ministers in Scotland, and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in N Ireland.
- ❖ Some claimants are unprotected members of the FPS; some are unprotected members of the modified section of the NFPS; and some are both.
- ❖ All have an age discrimination claim and an equal pay claim. Women also have a gender discrimination claim and black and ethnic minority members have a race discrimination claim.



VIEW
FROM THE
AERIAL LADDER
PLATFORM

Tianjin: 'No firefighter should ever go

A series of explosions rocked the Chinese port of Tianjin on 12 August. They came from a warehouse storing hazardous chemicals and claimed the lives of 173 people, including 104 firefighters.

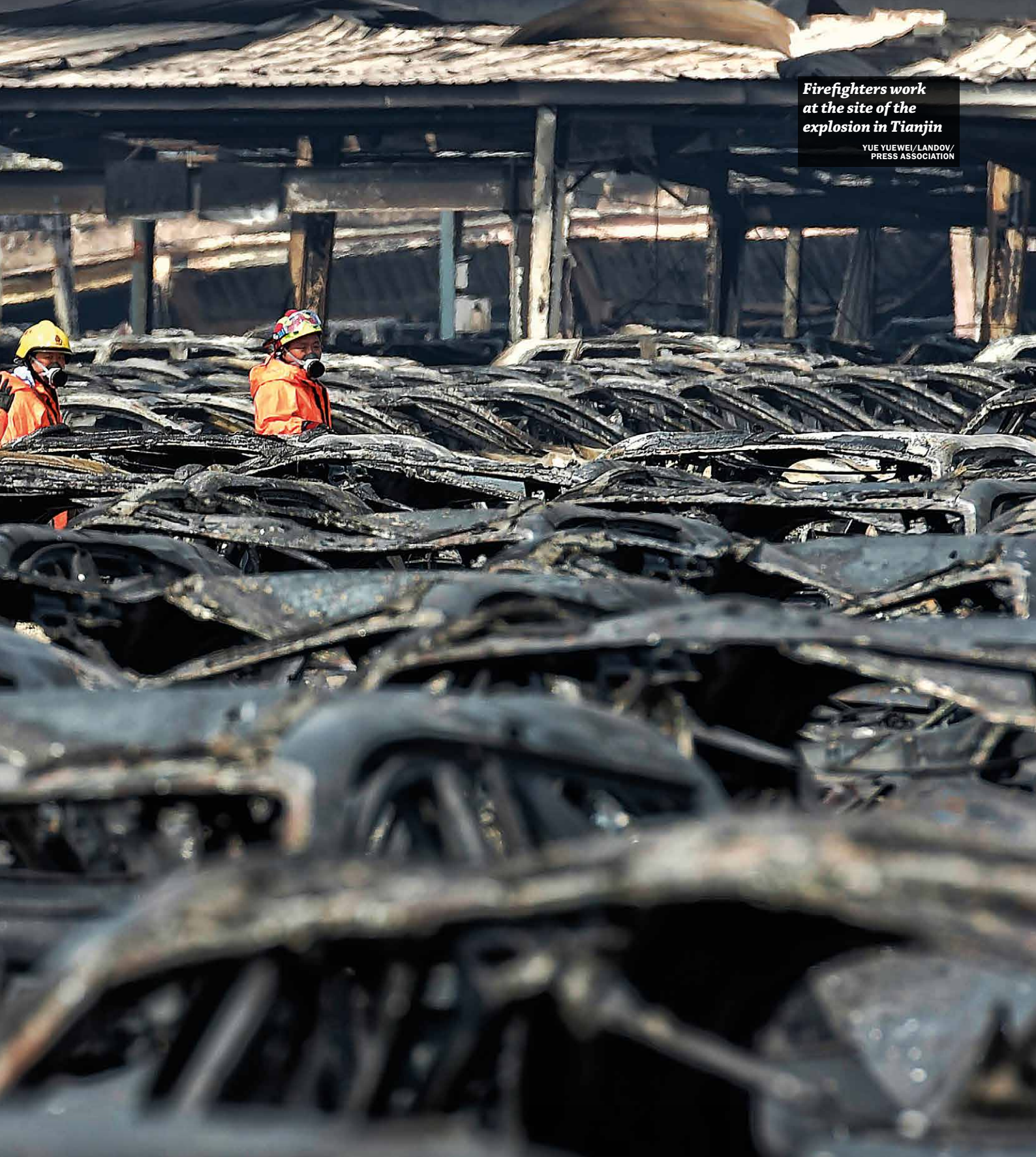
Although praised by Chinese media, the initial response of firefighters, the first emergency workers to arrive at the

scene, has raised questions about the preparedness of the Chinese fire service as it attempted to put the chemical fire out with water, causing subsequent explosions.

Wang Yuan, a longstanding Tianjin firefighter, told reporters after the incident that he and his colleagues had barely been trained to use foam and sand and

acknowledged that he himself did not fully understand how to put out chemical fires. Relatives of the firefighters killed have demanded answers from authorities over why they were never given this training.

Workers' rights in China are heavily suppressed. Its only trade union – the All-China Federation of Trade Unions – is



**Firefighters work
at the site of the
explosion in Tianjin**

YUE YUEWEI/LANDOV/
PRESS ASSOCIATION

to work expecting to lose their life'

state-run and undemocratic. Training for firefighters is minimal and there is no voice for them in the workplace to fight for improvements.

The *China Labour Bulletin* reports that, although the families of the firefighters killed will receive compensation – 20 times the national average for fatalities in the

workplace – it is only because in high profile cases like Tianjin, or a warehouse fire in Harbin, also in China, earlier this year where five firefighters were killed, media coverage has focused on the young, poorly trained and poorly paid firefighters who died.

In a letter of condolence to the Chinese ambassador in London, Matt Wrack, FBU

general secretary, wrote: "Firefighting can be a dangerous profession, but as a trade union who have fought for the improved safety protection for firefighters in the UK, we refuse to accept deaths as part of our job.

"Whether in the UK or China no firefighter should ever go to work expecting to lose their life."

FIGHTBACK MU

Trade Union Bill proposals are a deliberate attempt to

The Tories' proposed trade union legislation is intended to scrap basic rights for working people. It will:

- **neuter** trade unions by virtually outlawing industrial action
- **limit** union representation by denying time off for union duties
- **cut** union numbers by ending check-off; and
- **dictate** how unions spend their own money

Quite simply the government's proposed new law is intended to weaken workers and strengthen employers.

If these class-based proposals become law, it will become incredibly difficult for most unions to ever take legal industrial action. Prime minister David Cameron had already said he wants to make strikes illegal unless half of those entitled to vote in a ballot support action.

Many elections in the UK do not meet this requirement – the London mayor was elected on a turnout of just 38.1%.

In addition, for firefighters and others in 'important' public services, they plan to impose an additional arbitrary threshold of "40% of those eligible to vote".

In any democracy, 51% is a majority. That is the system that elected the Tory MPs who back these measures. Last May the Conservatives polled 24% of those entitled to vote and 37% of those who did so. There is one standard for them and another for us.

Workplace ballots outlawed

The government argues it is legitimate to ask for higher voting thresholds, yet it does everything to stifle members' ability to participate.

They have already outlawed workplace balloting and now they refuse to allow union members to vote online – yet Conservative Party members will be able to vote online in order to choose their

candidate for London mayor.

Although the FBU generally obtains high turnouts in such ballots, it will be difficult for many other unions to meet the thresholds required.

The only way to achieve these thresholds is through solid workplace organisation with representation in every workplace.

And the government's Bill will attack the ability of unions to do that as well.

Make it harder to join

The Bill would abolish the check-off system where union subs are deducted at source by the employer. This is despite the fact that all such arrangements are voluntary agreements between the employer, the union and the individual.

The aim is simply to make it harder for workers to join and stay in unions.

The proposed law comes close to making picketing an illegal act. It will be criminal to engage in "unlawful or intimidatory" picketing; but who is going to decide if anyone is "intimidated"? And, while pickets will be limited to six, named officials will have to "oversee" their colleagues.

In addition, any union with a dispute lasting more than four months will have to re-ballot its members, and employers must be given two weeks' notice before action.

This is intended to give employers time to hire another workforce to



ST START HERE

allow employers to dominate a weakened workforce



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

break the strike – because another part of this Bill makes it legal for any employer to take on agency staff for this specific purpose.

This law would make strike-breaking legal while it attempts to make taking industrial action a criminal offence.

The intention is to make it almost impossible to mount legal industrial action.

The requirement to give “a clear description of the trade dispute and the planned industrial action on the ballot paper” will prove a minefield for unions – and a gold mine for lawyers.

And unions can expect no favours from the Certification Officer who could then fine unions £20,000 for any breaches of reporting rules and make unions pay for investigations into allegations made against them.

The proposals are a deliberate attempt to allow employers to dominate a weakened workforce.

Bid to stop political campaigning

More than this, the Bill includes measures to prevent opposition to its crude attacks on working people.

It seeks to prevent unions from campaigning against them by seeking to undermine the political levy.

All unions will be required every five years to ask each member if they wish to pay this levy, insisting that they opt in rather than opt out.

This is a blatant attempt to prevent any political activity by unions – such as opposing measures like the Trade Union Bill, campaigning against privatisation or attacks on pensions.

The Trade Union Bill is not only an attack on trade unions. It threatens basic civil rights; it subverts democratic standards; and it seeks to eliminate political and industrial opposition.

The FBU will stand with other unions, human rights groups, political groupings and any other organisation prepared to confront these cynical, dangerous and unjust proposals.

Together, we can – and must – resist.



STEFANO CAGNONI

WHICH SERVICE? POLICE, POLICE OR

National official **Dave Green** examines the real reasons behind government plans to put police commissioners in charge of fire services in England and the dire consequences if they are successful

The government is proposing legislation that would enable local authorities in England to put fire and rescue service employees and resources under the control of local police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and, in London, the mayor, with the explicit intention of “savings millions of pounds”.

The FBU is preparing a robust response to the plans, which were published in September, as part of the consultation process which closes on 23 October.

The fire and rescue service (FRS) has a long history of working with police and ambulance services – attending the scenes of incidents from fires to road traffic accidents, floods and medical emergencies to terrorism.

This has worked well. One reason is that the roles of these services, when our paths cross, have been distinct and separate. The fire service operational response is about effecting rescue and defending communities – the police remit, in the main, is to keep the public safe and ensure that the ambulance and fire service are able to extricate and treat casualties.

The FRS and the police have been placed under tremendous financial pressure since 2010 by austerity measures imposed by the Westminster government.

Frontline jobs cut

Fire and rescue services have suffered a cut in frontline firefighters of nearly 7,000, around 12% of the workforce.

The government has cited the decline in fires and fire deaths as justification for reducing jobs. This fails to take into account the prevention and education work done by firefighters in our communities.

Smoke detectors are now regarded as absolutely vital in all homes, as is the educational work done in schools and community

centres daily by firefighters, on fire safety and many other safety issues – additional work that is now regarded as routine

The government’s proposal is that PCCs will run the fire service and the ambulance service as well. The police service with its substantially bigger budget, employing far more people, would control the day-to-day running of fire and rescue services.

Hived off to private sector

The police services would impose their will, values and beliefs – despite having no experience, training or understanding of our culture and how we work. They would always be looking to skim from the FRS budget to compensate for their own funding shortfalls.

The FRS would continue to be dismantled before the government eventually succeeds in its ultimate aim of hiving the service off to its friends in the private sector.

While the government and PCCs may suggest other reasons for the proposed changes, the issue, in reality, is about budgets and protecting the police. Such a “collaboration” would undermine the invaluable fire prevention and safety work that goes on in our communities.

The two services are also perceived very differently – our members enjoy the neutrality of the fire service. Put simply, firefighters are well liked and, in some areas, the police are not.

The role of the police is law enforcement,

The fire and rescue service would continue to be dismantled before the government eventually succeeds in its ultimate aim of hiving the service off to its friends in the private sector



POLICE?



Clear distinction: Police officer in Croydon during disorder, arson and looting in August 2011. But what about the future?

PICTURE: CARL DE SOUZA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and their educational work is about preventing law-breaking. By undertaking this role the police service becomes an agent of the establishment (the lawmakers) and will therefore attract criticism from some quarters.

The FRS advises communities, across all ages and social classes, to alert them to the dangers of fire. We generally have no enforcement rights, neither would we wish to have them. So we have no powers to detain those we believe have transgressed.

Erosion of public trust

This distinction is something our communities understand, and this difference needs to remain. To remove it could lead to conflict. We will, without doubt, see the erosion of the public trust that we rely on daily when we need access to peoples' homes if PCCs take over the fire service.

Firefighters have enjoyed a higher profile in their communities in recent years, leading to fewer attacks on firefighters – investigations by the FBU have shown that there were around 1,500 such incidents in England and Wales ten years ago. This figure has been cut in half largely, we believe, because of the increased presence of firefighters in their local communities.

PCCs have no electoral mandate. Those who won office in the latest round of elections were backed by just 14% of the population. Neither are they obliged to display any competence for their role.

The Labour manifesto for the last election committed the party to abolishing PCCs as it saw no value in them and, aside from the Conservative Party, no other organisation defended PCCs when they were threatened with extinction.

Seeking credibility

The government, now run exclusively by Tories who have played fast and loose with emergency services over the past five years, aims to give credibility to PCCs by handing over a popular, effective and well liked institution for them to “run”. They may well be looking forward to the adulation they hope will be heaped on them by their association with firefighters.

Society needs law enforcement, a medical and a fire and emergency response, and these functions are carried out admirably by the three services working in collaboration, all facing distinct, but different pressing issues.

Instead of hawking half-baked ideas with money saving at their core, the government would do better to figure out how our emergency services can work together more effectively to defend our communities and keep everyone safe.

More will be revealed by police spy inquiry

Merrick Badger of COPS (Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance) says illegal police spying on trade unionists and peaceful campaigners forced government to institute an inquiry

It is nearly five years since the undercover police officer Mark Kennedy was exposed as having lived among peaceful campaigners under an assumed identity, having long term intimate relationships with them and trying to incite direct political action.

These revelations have since been dwarfed by the revelation that hundreds of other police officers were involved in the same sort of surveillance.

The Metropolitan Police established its Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) in 1968 with a remit which was rapidly expanded to include any activity seen as a political threat. It did not distinguish between a threat to life and limb, a threat to corporate profit or a threat to the established political order.

The squad targeted not only street marches that they thought might turn violent, they also infiltrated a range of movements including peace, anti-racist and LGBT campaigners.

SPIED ON: The thousands of fans, friends and relatives at Liverpool's Anfield stadium to mark the 21st anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster in which 96 Liverpool supporters died.

JOHN POWELL/LIVERPOOL FC



SPIED ON: Anti-racists like supporters of the Anti Nazi League seen here with musician Billy Bragg (right) at a 1993 ANL rally in Brixton

MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES



SPIED ON: Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen Lawrence, and his brother Stuart

EPA/TAL COHEN

The issue leapt into public consciousness when it was revealed that the family of teenager Stephen Lawrence, who died in a racist murder, had been spied on.

Doreen and Neville Lawrence were never a threat to the public. They merely sought the truth about why the police failed to investigate properly, exposing the racist elements within the institution in the process.

Squandered

The resources that could have jailed Stephen's killers were squandered on undermining those who knew him. The Metropolitan Police has admitted spying on at least 17 other similar campaigns.

Elected public figures have also been singled out for surveillance. Jenny Jones, a Green member of the Greater London Assembly, has a file that was started *after* she was elected and continued for 11 years. Peter Francis, the one officer involved to blow the whistle, says he spied on officials from five trade unions, including the FBU.

This is not keeping the country safe by routing out shady bomb-throwers. It is the monitoring of democratically elected representatives.

Once dismissed by employers as an urban myth, the mass blacklisting of

construction workers was confirmed in 2009 when the Information Commissioner's Office raided the offices of the Consulting Association – which had files on over 3,000 workers.

Construction firms supplied the company with personal information on any worker who attempted union organising on site, raised health and safety issues or just seemed a bit "lefty".

But information in the files could not have come only from site managers. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has admitted it was routine for every police service's Special Branch section to supply information to the blacklist.

Breaking the law

This is the illegal passing of information to a company itself participating in illegal activity to prevent workers from asserting their rights. This is not police officers upholding the law, this is police officers breaking the law.

Embarrassed by the snowballing revelations of such law breaking, the government belatedly agreed to a public inquiry. Led by Lord Justice Pitchford, it is in the first stages of defining its structure.

For those spied on, like the Hillsborough families or the racial and family justice campaigns, there is a feeling of weariness. They have seen inquiries come and go, only to be negated



SPIED ON Green Party member Jenny Jones and, in 2004, deputy mayor of London at a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament rally

PETER MARSHALL/GETTY IMAGES

If just one officer spied on five unions, what is the true total when 150 were involved?



SPIED ON: Dave Smith, a victim of blacklisting, who has revealed that the Metropolitan Police spied on the FBU general secretary, at the union conference earlier this year

STEFANO CAGNONI

by later revelations that they were hoodwinked. Others, like the blacklisted construction workers, are relishing the first proper chance to pull the issue into the national spotlight.

The inquiry

It is projected to take two to three years to complete the inquiry and, frankly, that is a conservative estimate. We can expect much more to come out, and many people will learn that people they thought were comrades were spies.

If just one officer spied on five unions, what is the true total? If Mark Kennedy was responsible for 49 wrongful convictions, how many were caused by the other 150 or so officers?

There are women who spent years living with a man who was only ever in their lives as an agent paid to undermine them, whose face is forever in the family photos but whose real name is unknown to them. A group of these women brought a legal case against the police in 2011 that is still not settled.

The police have refused to come clean, going to absurd lengths to pretend the issue is too secret and a threat to national security. They have even refused to name Mark Kennedy in court. (By the way, Kennedy hired disgraced PR man Max Clifford to sell his story to the *Mail on Sunday* – you can't get any less secret than that.)

It may be naïve to expect the whole truth to be made public as a result of this inquiry, but it will increase the public understanding of how much power the state has. Hopefully, we are all about to learn a lot more.

Trade unions in a fight for their lives

FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said the UK trade union movement was facing a fight for its existence and that the Tories were engaging in “class war” with their Trade Union Bill.

Speaking at a fringe meeting of the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group – set up by nine national unions to co-ordinate campaigning activities in parliament – Wrack (right) said: “The Bill is the biggest attack on trade union rights in over 30 years. It amounts to nothing less than class war against ordinary working people.”

“Trade unions are the first line of defence against attacks on workers’ rights, the rights of ordinary working people to campaign and fight for decent pay and conditions. We, as trade unionists, need to take these threats to our rights very seriously.”

Wrack called on union leaders to mobilise their members to take to the streets in protest against the introduction of the bill, calling for a Jeremy Corbyn style campaign to be mounted by trade union members.

Congress later agreed to a co-ordinated campaign against austerity involving more groups from outside the core trade union movement.



Coordinated action and demonstrations for fair pay

FBU president Alan McLean spoke in support of a motion calling for trade unions to undertake “co-ordinated industrial action and mass demonstrations” in the face of four more years without a pay rise. McLean told congress how firefighters, alongside all public sector workers, had suffered as a result of the freeze.

“Workers should never be embarrassed to talk about pay because the government will never be embarrassed about freezing and attacking your pay,” McLean told congress.

The motion committed the TUC to organising a mass demonstration against austerity in early 2016.

How police spied on union activists

An FBU fringe event heard how Matt Wrack and former FBU general secretary Ken Cameron were among trade union activists the police spied on.

Dave Smith (author of *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists*) and Helen Steel (campaigner from *Police Spies, Out of Lives*) revealed how police officers using the assumed identities of dead children had deceived them by posing as a work colleague and romantic partner respectively.



Firefighter and FBU rep Lucy Masoud tells congress why the right to strike is important to her

Pictures: Andrew Wiard

Highlights from TUC Congress 2015

Campaign against police takeover

Delegates voted to support an emergency resolution, moved by the FBU’s Andy Noble, calling on congress to oppose any moves by police and crime commissioners to take control of local fire and rescue services and to organise a high profile campaign in opposition to the proposals.

■ More on PCCs see page 12.

The 147th Trades Union Congress met in Brighton in September to discuss, debate and decide how best to protect workers’ rights over the next year

New Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn ‘good news for firefighters’

Jeremy Corbyn’s election as Labour leader, announced on the eve of congress, was a popular choice with delegates.

Corbyn received a standing ovation before delivering his guest speech in which he confirmed that, under a Labour government, the Trade Union Bill would be repealed and the pay cap lifted.

Matt Wrack said of Corbyn: “He is very good news for firefighters and other public sector workers whose unions are fighting hard to protect their right to strike.”



■ Campaigning for pregnant workers

Employers are putting the lives of pregnant women and children at risk by not allowing time off to attend antenatal classes, congress heard.

The FBU's Jo Byrne (*below*), who represents control members on the union's executive council, supported the motion to ensure that all women in the workplace are guaranteed time off work to attend antenatal classes as well as campaigning on broader pregnancy rights.



Byrne told conference about the particular difficulties facing women firefighters: "Women

in the fire service are more often than not isolated from their work mates whilst on maternity leave, and for breastfeeding firefighters, the situation is further exacerbated by them being still unable to return to operational duties because of the risk of transferring toxins to the baby through their breast milk.

"Punitive maternity policies restrict their ability to breastfeed exclusively for six months."

■ Politicians must tackle misuse of police powers

Congress unanimously called for politicians to deliver serious proposals to tackle the disproportionate use of powers, such as "stop and search" used by the police, against people from ethnic minority communities.

Speaking on behalf of the FBU, Micky Nicholas (*below*), the longstanding secretary of the union's Black and Ethnic Minority Members section, told congress how off-duty firefighters had been challenged.

He cited the 2012 case of FBU member

Edric Kennedy-MacFoy who tried to assist police officers only to be abused, tasered and then arrested.

It was also announced at congress that Nicholas will join the TUC's general council representing BME trade union members. He said: "That I have been elected as the first black FBU official to join the council, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first FBU B&EMM meeting, is an honour and another sign of our progression in the trade union movement."



MALE SUICIDE

Silent epidemic that kills more than RTAs

Need help?
Call CALM's
confidential
helpline on
0800 58 58 58
5pm-midnight
365 days a
year

It is a silent epidemic that kills more people annually in the UK than road traffic accidents. Suicide is a tragedy that more and more people are having first-hand experience of – FBU members included.

Guildford firefighter Tim Lockett, who also served as an FBU area official in the South East, tragically took his own life on 11 July. He had suffered from a long-term bipolar disorder which resulted in bouts of severe depression.

In the last weeks of his life Tim, who would speak openly about his battle with depression, had been putting together plans on how best those suffering with mental health issues and depression in the fire and rescue service could be helped.

He was passionate about questioning the stigma surrounding mental health and challenging the logic of men suffering depression in silence.

Tim's experience is sadly not an isolated case. In the past three years at least 12 FBU members have taken their own lives. All were men. Given the union's size and the national trend over the past three years, this means the number of suicides is a third higher than the UK average.

Suicide is without prejudice. It affects

all sections of society regardless of gender, ethnicity or class. However suicide currently stands as the biggest single killer of men aged 20–45 in the UK. In 2013 alone 4,858 men committed suicide.

The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), set up in 1997 to tackle male suicide, believes social and cultural barriers are responsible for men not feeling able to speak out.

Toxic combination

Jane Powell, the charity's chief executive, says that while the suicide rate among women has halved since the 1980s, the rate for men has risen. "Men often feel that they need to be in control at all times and if you're not in control you're not a 'real man'. That is a toxic combination," she says.

The charity's research shows that men often say they are not comfortable expressing how they feel if they are having a miserable time. Its research also shows that men who go on to commit suicide are most often those who have never spoken about it or reached out for help.

CALM believe raising awareness is a key step to tackling the issue, advising that ways of getting support should be advertised prominently in the workplace.

What can I do if I think someone I know is going through this?

When her brother committed suicide Sydney-based firefighter Tara J. Lal trained in suicide prevention and began working to promote mental health issues among firefighters.

In her book *Standing on my Brother's Shoulders* she gives straightforward advice about what to do if you are worried about a co-worker or someone in your life.

Take them aside in a quiet, private place where you won't be interrupted or just take them for a coffee. Ask the person directly: "I've noticed you don't seem like your usual self recently. How are you going?"

Genuine concern

If you merely ask "Are you OK?" 90% of people will say "Yes". So make sure you ask an open question and ask it with genuine concern.

If they don't want to talk, you can't force them, but make sure you keep checking regularly. At least once a week.

Listen to their story with your full attention. Never judge, talk over someone, or tell them how they are feeling. Just hear what they are saying and reflect back to them. Saying things like "It sounds like things have been really tough for you recently" can help.

If you are concerned that they might be having thoughts of suicide it is important to ask the question directly. "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" or "Have you thought about taking your own life?"

Let the person know that help is available and depression is a treatable condition, just like any physical illness.

You could let them know that it is possible to take a self-check questionnaire for depression online if they are not sure if they are OK.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION?

FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS AND HOPELESSNESS. A bleak outlook – nothing will ever get better and there is nothing you can do to improve your situation.

RECKLESS BEHAVIOUR. You engage in escapist behaviour such as substance abuse, compulsive gambling, reckless driving, or dangerous sports.

SELF-LOATHING. Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt. You harshly criticise yourself for perceived faults and mistakes.

LOSS OF INTEREST IN DAILY ACTIVITIES. No interest in former hobbies, pastimes, social activities, or sex. You have lost your ability to feel joy and pleasure.

ANGER OR IRRITABILITY. Feeling agitated, restless, or even violent. Your tolerance level

is low, your temper short, and everything and everyone gets on your nerves.

APPETITE OR WEIGHT CHANGES. Significant weight loss or gain – a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month.

SLEEP CHANGES. Either insomnia, especially waking in the early hours of the morning, or oversleeping (also known as hypersomnia).

LOSS OF ENERGY. Feeling sluggish, and physically drained. Your whole body may feel heavy, and even small tasks are exhausting.

CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS. Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering things.

UNEXPLAINED ACHES AND PAINS. An increase in physical complaints such as headaches, back pain, aching muscles, and stomach pain.

Legal Beagle

FBU member wins £108,000 compensation

FBU
FREEPHONE
LEGAL ADVICE
0808 100 6061
IN SCOTLAND
0800 089 1331

A firefighter from Louth in Lincolnshire has received £108,000 in compensation after an accident at work left him with a permanent injury.

He was part of a team responding to a call where a lorry that was transporting pigs had turned over. Firefighters were instructed to move the dead pigs from the back of the lorry to allow access to the animals that were trapped but still alive.

The lorry was lying on a slope, which meant two of the firefighters had to climb up the incline to access the back of the vehicle. The FBU member was standing at the top of the slope while his colleague was standing inside the lorry.

The dead animals were heavy and difficult to grip. When lifting one of them out of the lorry's back door, the FBU member slipped and fell backwards, landing on his elbows and jolting his left shoulder.

He was diagnosed with a muscle injury but, after four months of physiotherapy, he was re-examined and it was discovered that he had torn his shoulder muscle and tendons. Nine months after his accident he had surgery, but doctors were unable to repair the damaged tendons. He had a further six months of physiotherapy, after which he was fit enough to return to work.

The FBU instructed Thompsons Solicitors to pursue compensation.

"I am relieved to be back in work on full operational duties but it is a struggle to use my left arm above shoulder height," said the FBU member.

"Despite making good progress since my fall, I doubt that I'll be able to continue in my line of work until retirement age because it is so physically demanding."

Dave Green, FBU national officer, said: "Our member was sent in without a proper risk assessment of the environment in which he would be operating and the result was a permanent injury. A little bit more thought and the personal cost to our member's health and to his brigade's finances could have been avoided."

Jane Toplis of Thompsons Solicitors said: "It is telling that, after the FBU member's accident, six personnel were tasked to move the animals from the lorry – three times the staff allowed a chain gang with smaller distances to haul the carcasses and less chance of slipping than when our client first arrived at the scene."

"Had a proper assessment been made this accident would never have happened."

Other examples of satisfactory claims made on behalf of FBU members in 2015

SUZANNA LUMB of North Yorkshire was injured when the motorcycle she was a passenger on collided with a stationary vehicle. She suffered numerous soft tissue injuries to her neck, shoulder,



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

back, knees and hands. The other side's insurers refused to negotiate settlement and it was necessary to commence court proceedings. Satisfactory settlement terms of £10,567.65 were agreed and, after deductions to cover pay from her employer, our member received a cheque for £7,742.36.

DEBORAH HUGHES of West Yorkshire was compensated after tripping on a kerb while training to take part in the Leeds half marathon. She suffered ligament damage and a chipped bone in her ankle as well as pain in her lower back. Settlement terms were agreed at £8,000 after negotiations and our member received the full amount.

LEE WARE of Essex suffered an injury to his neck when a vehicle collided with the fire

engine he was travelling on. His claim for compensation was successful after Thompsons, on the FBU's behalf, entered detailed negotiations and correspondence with the other side's representatives. After a deduction of £425 to pay for private rehabilitation treatment, our member received a cheque for £4,575.

ANTHONY ROBINSON was

injured in work when a wall socket blew up in the fire station kitchen, giving him an electric shock and throwing him to the floor. Following correspondence and negotiations, a satisfactory settlement of £5,000 was reached with the other side's representatives, of which our member received the full amount.

CARL WHITWORTH'S wife was injured in Bowness-on-Windermere when she tripped and fell because of potholes in the road. A satisfactory settlement was reached and, after a deduction to repay refundable sick pay to her employers, she received a cheque for £8,199.

As a union member, you can obtain 30 minutes' free confidential telephone advice on any non-work-related legal matter, including on criminal law, consumer law, property and land law, wills and trusts, nuisance and trespass and a host of other legal issues. Please contact FBU Legal Services on 0808 100 6061 or, in Scotland, 0800 089 1331 for more information.

'I got my first bike 29 years ago, and haven't been without one since'

Stavros Marangos, who works from Stanmore in north west London, is off on a bracing break with a purpose in December – a marathon motorcycle trek in The Gambia

Stavros, who has ridden motorbikes for nearly 30 years, is intent on raising as much cash as he can for Riders for Health, a ground-breaking British charity helping to deliver life saving healthcare to millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa.

As the name suggests, motorcycles play a key role: reliable transport is crucial to reaching rural communities and delivering desperately needed basic healthcare.

Stavros, green watch crew manager at Stanmore, has seen first hand how Riders for Health is transforming lives.

Three years ago, he went on an eye-opening "Experience Africa" trip to Zambia organised by the charity, riding over rough terrain alongside health workers taking vital care to remote villages.

"It's amazing what they achieve – there is so much we take for granted. It was really good to see how motorcycles are helping to save lives by getting health workers and supplies out to the people who need them."

Stavros was so impressed with what he saw that he vowed to return to Africa, inspired to raise funds to help keep more health riders on the road. So now he's off to The Gambia – and hoping firefighters will check out the charity website and donate to a very worthy cause.

The charity equips local health workers with the skills they need to maintain their vehicles – and provides training programmes for technicians, mechanics and four-wheel drive fleet managers. This is sustainable development in action.

For if vehicles often break down, millions of pounds invested in drugs, vaccines, mosquito nets, condoms and training health professionals risk going to waste. Building up local skills means fewer breakdowns and vital help getting to where it's needed.

Vital health outreach

Stavros is no stranger to charity fundraising. He's run marathons, jumped out of planes and even crewed a square-rigger. But, for him, riding a motorcycle across rugged terrain and beautiful scenery to raise funds for motorbikes delivering vital health outreach is a perfect fundraising fit.

"I got my first bike 29 years ago, and haven't been without one since," he says. And he has a bit of a history when it comes to making long-haul journeys.

In 1994, he rode to his ancestral home in Greece, covering 2,831 miles in five weeks, on a 1,000 cc sports bike. He's rented Harley Davidsons in the US three times, and, in one of the "scariest" rides

of his life, drove an Indian-made Royal Enfield in the foothills of the Himalayas. On a trip to Zambia he covered 1,000 kilometres. He spent half the journey "off road" – and was very glad he'd had a few lessons before he got to Africa. Stavros usually rides to work on one of his five motorcycles – a far less arduous route across North London – from Palmers Green to Stanmore.

7/7 attacks

Stavros, now 52, came late to firefighting. A trained fitter, he joined the firefighting team at Holloway station ten years ago after 20 years in the family decorating business. Two months in, he was among firefighters called to Tavistock Place in central London – where a bomb on a bus killed ten people and injured many more in the 7/7 terrorist attacks. "It had just been announced London had got the Olympics the day before and there was a lot of celebrating. The mood changed completely when the bombs went off," he recalls.

Stavros has very much taken to firefighting – he was acting crew manager at Ilford, and crew manager at the now-closed Kingsland station before moving to Stanmore.

Going from self-employment to the fire service was "a bit of a culture shock ... I was the new boy on the block taking orders from people half my age at first. But you've got to learn how it's done. I'm really glad I made the move."

As a firefighter, he knows that expecting the unexpected comes with the territory. Being called out to deal with the aftermath of terrorist bombings couldn't seem further removed from delivering fire safety checks at an old people's home, he says. But it's all part of the job.

Stavros met local pensioner Diana Gould – the oldest person to carry the Olympic torch in the run-up to the Paralympics in 2012 – on a fire home safety check visit recently. She carried the Olympic flame to Middlesex University when she was 100.

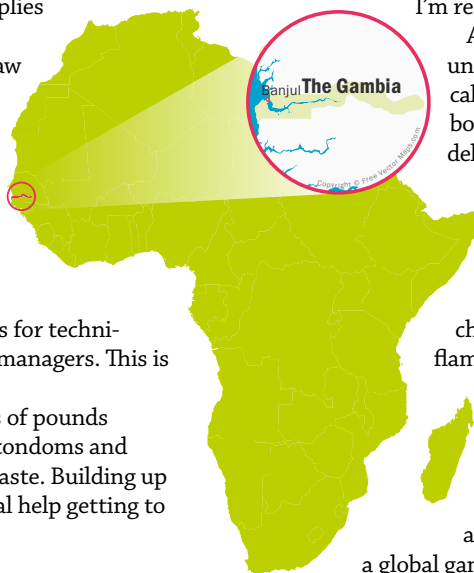
Back at Stanmore station, Stavros has stuck a donations form up on the noticeboard and is getting ready for his fundraising trip to The Gambia.

Riders for Health has a strong following among motorcyclists – and is recognised as a global game-changer in sustainable development, improving access healthcare through reliable transport in seven sub-Saharan African countries. It has reached more than 14 million people.

A proportion of the fees that Stavros and others pay to go on the charity's "Experience Africa" rides is ploughed straight back into getting healthcare out to those who need it. Stavros is doing his bit. Check out the websites and see for yourself how access to basic healthcare is making a difference to millions of lives.

■ You can donate via: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/StaMar>

■ For more information about Riders for Health visit www.riders.org or to find out more about Experience Africa visit <http://www.riders-experience.org>.





Prize quiz



Win a £100 Waterstones gift voucher for use in store or online

HOW TO ENTER

To win a £100 Waterstones gift voucher send your answers by 31 October on a postcard to: Prize Competition (October 2015), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Please include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.



PA IMAGES

1 Isla Margarita lies off the coast of which South American country?

- A – Brazil
- B – Colombia
- C – Venezuela
- D – Chile

2 Dr Seuss did not write which of the following books?

- A – Fox in Socks
- B – The Lorax
- C – The Cat in a Hat
- D – The Magic Faraway Tree

3 Which farmyard animal is David Cameron particularly fond of – allegedly?

- A – A pig
- B – A horse
- C – A sheep
- D – A chicken



PA IMAGES

4 Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party with what percentage of first-preference votes?

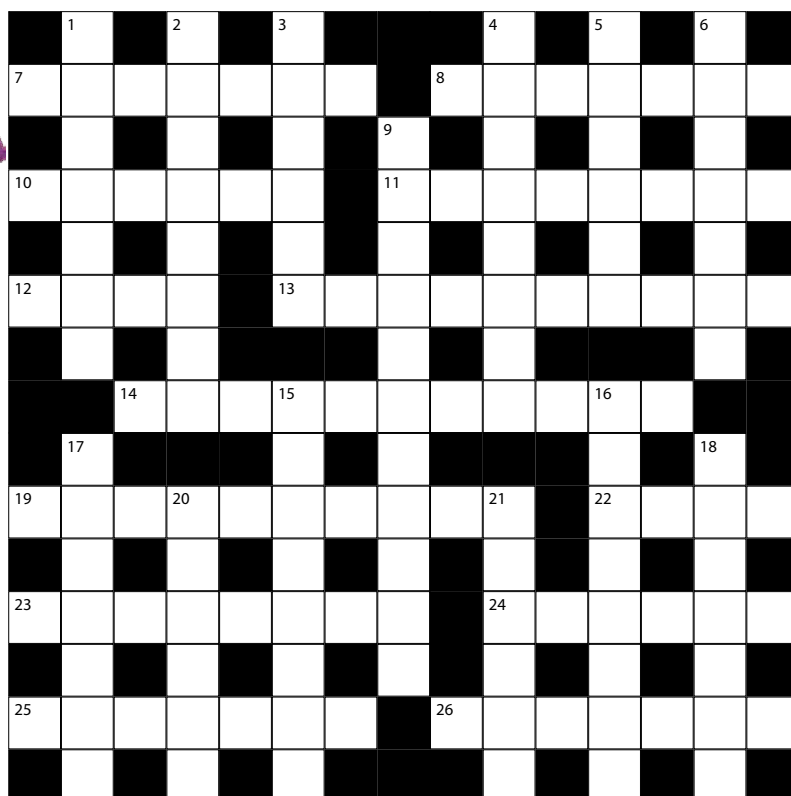
- A – 51%
- B – 57%
- C – 60%
- D – 59.5%



PA IMAGES

5 In what was described as the “greatest Rugby World Cup shock ever”, South Africa were beaten by which team on the second day of the 2015 Rugby World Cup?

- A – Japan
- B – Uruguay
- C – Italy
- D – Canada



CROSSWORD

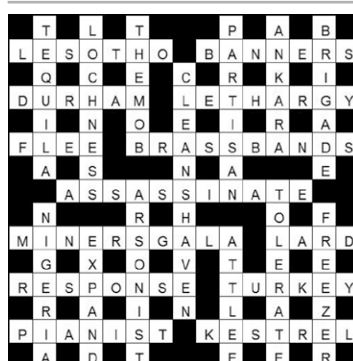
ACROSS

- 7** Type of lamp – filled with this gas (7)
- 8** More than a couple, less than a lot? (7)
- 10, 20** Labour leader (6, 6)
- 11** Not fit to eat (8)
- 12** Protest, for short (4)
- 13** Army rank, originally from the French (10)
- 14** Labour’s new shadow business secretary (6,5)
- 19** It’s studied at Hogwarts! (10)
- 22** What we fight (4)
- 23** Frightening (8)
- 24** Tom – 10, 20’s deputy (6)
- 25** Small enclosure to keep small children safe (4-3)
- 26** Brass instrument (7)

DOWN

- 1** Provider of food and refreshment (7)
- 2** Mortgage (4,4)
- 3** Mr Hyde’s alter ego (6)
- 4** Degenerative brain condition (8)
- 5** Concede chess match (or leave job) (6)
- 6** Estonian capital (7)
- 9** One’s immediate boss (4,7)
- 15** Hemmed in on all sides – or included in mailing (8)
- 16** One’s natural span (8)
- 17** Flying beetle with luminescent organs (7)
- 18** Twisted, or dishonest (7)
- 20** See 10 (6)
- 21** Prevent, or frustrate another’s intention (6)

Last issue’s answers and winners



Crossword solution August/September

August/September quiz answers


- 1 – C** Jeremy Corbyn
- 2 – B** Swearing a secret oath as members of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers
- 3 – D** Earning a minimum wage
- 4 – A** Vote
- 5 – B** 28 April

Winner of July quiz

Clive Cook, Kent


Station Cat Leadership – and its effects

Amazing what a new leader can do

 Wonderful how right wing newspapers and politicians have suddenly got in touch with their feminist side. Men who have never before shown much interest in gender equality are angrily denouncing Jeremy Corbyn for not promoting enough women.

Some women also seem to be inspired by the new man at the top. During the leadership election, Yvette Cooper revealed a burning passion for having women at the top of her party, a passion which she did not seem to feel five years ago, in 2010, when her husband Ed Balls was a candidate for the leadership.

That's what you get for helping people

 Since there are hardly any fires to fight any more, firefighters should turn their attention to tackling child obesity. That, according to the *Daily Mail*, is the burden of a report from the Local Government Association (LGA.)


But it isn't. If you look up the actual report, you find that in many parts of the country, firefighters have already taken on important health promotion work – not because they had nothing else to do, but because they thought it mattered.

In Kent, for example, they are helping older people, particularly those

with dementia. In Norfolk and Suffolk they are helping overweight teenagers to become more active.

If all the recognition they get is a sneering story saying that they ought to be doing it because they have nothing else to do, perhaps they will think better of it.

Why the firefighting PM had to go

 “Unelectable” they said of Jeremy Corbyn. Perhaps Labour's new leader will take comfort from the story of the recently deposed Australian prime minister Tony Abbott, who had won the leadership of Australia's Liberal Party by just one vote.

“If you had a drink every time you heard the word ‘unelectable’ that day you would have been hammered by lunch time,” recalls *BuzzFeed News*. He went on to be elected, but let's hope Corbyn's fate is different. Abbott's party promptly dumped him.

Was that fair? On the plus side, Mr Abbott could boast ten years as a volunteer firefighter. On the minus side he was, well, just the tiniest bit racist, and sexist, and crass. “No-one, however smart, however well-

educated, however experienced, is the suppository of all wisdom,” he said in 2013; apparently he meant “repository,” not “suppository”. The next year he


offered his thoughts on women: “As many of us know, women are particularly focused on the household budget and the repeal of the carbon tax means a Aus\$550 (US\$390) a year benefit for the average family”.

Four years earlier he had explained carefully: “What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing is that if they get it done commercially, it's going to go up in price and their own power bills when they switch the iron on are going to go up.”

He made Prince Philip an Australian knight – apparently the nation's highest honour – and described Aborigines living in government-funded remote communities as making a lifestyle choice.

Volunteer firefighter or not, he had to go.

The not so good old days

 On 17 September the London Fire Brigade put out a press release to mark the 75th anniversary of a notable act of bravery by wartime auxiliary firefighter Harry Errington – only they forgot a key part of Harry's story.

Just before midnight, a bomb virtually demolished a three-storey garage in Soho, the basement of which was used as an air raid shelter by Auxiliary Fire Service personnel.

The floors caved in and 20 people, including six firefighters, were killed outright.

At great personal risk, Harry rescued two of his colleagues, and was seriously burned.



Ousted Australian prime minister Tony Abbott receives his 10-year service medal at the Davidson Rural Fire Brigade in Sydney in March this year.

NIKKI SHORT/AAP/PA IMAGES

The press release omitted to mention that the fire brigade would only pay sick pay for 13 weeks.

Harry's burns took longer than that to heal, so he was fired on the same day that he received the George Cross. For that part of the story, you have to turn to Francis Beckett's



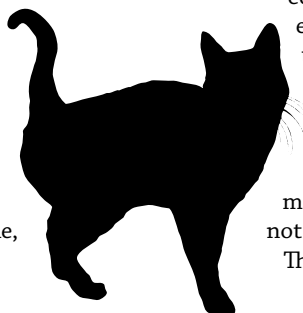
KIRSTY WIGLESWORTH / PA IMAGES

Harry Errington reflected in the mirror of a vintage fire engine on the 60th anniversary of the Blitz at the Imperial War Museum in London

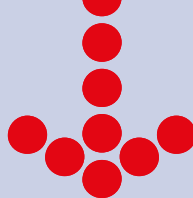
Firefighters and the Blitz (Merlin, 2010).

Harry returned to his pre-war occupation as a tailor. He was active in basketball administration (particularly during the London Olympics of 1948) and was treasurer of The Victoria Cross and George Cross Association until 1990.

Soho firefighters asked Harry into the station to celebrate his 90th birthday in 2000. He died in 2004.



25-year badges



Spencer Chapman (l), officers' branch, Lincolnshire, receives his 25-year badge from Lincolnshire brigade secretary Dan Taylor at Lincoln South station



Paul Howard (l) and **Andy White** (c), red watch, Brentwood, Essex, receive their 25-year badges from Matt Wrack at a pensions demonstration in London



Phillip Blakemore (l), business safety, HQ, Eastbourne, East Sussex, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Mark Brown



Chris Charley (r), red watch, Southport, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Brian Grimley



Tim Carr (r), Cambridgeshire, receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Cameron Matthews



Andy Stephen (r), Charlie watch, Wilmslow, Cheshire, receives his 25-year badge from Leigh Mullin



Dave Cappaert (l), green watch, Homerton, London, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Karl Haider, who recently stood down after 14 years' service to FBU colleagues



Gary Carabine (r), white watch, Washington, Tyne & Wear, receives his 25-year badge from brigade health and safety rep Steve Smiles with members of white watch looking on



Steve Peacher (l), white watch, Southend, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Ross Daynes



Martin Ketley (l), Chelmsford, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from general secretary Matt Wrack



Saul Murphy (r), red watch, Kirkdale, Merseyside, receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Steve Scummins



Richie Bambrough (l), blue watch, High Handenhold, Durham, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Steve Hagar



David Cayford (l), red watch, Loughton, Essex, receives his 25-year badge from executive council member Keith Handscomb

Please send digital files or prints to: firefighter@fbu.org.uk or Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Please include full details for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.

FBU regional offices

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REGION 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucs, Wilts, Dorset

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0117 935 5132, 13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Organiser of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

(England, Wales and N Ireland),

0800 089 1331

(Scotland),

The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.